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ABSTRACT

Techniques for improving college teaching are presented, noting higher education faculty are being encouraged to evaluate and improve their teaching effectiveness in the classroom. Traditionally, faculty have relied upon student evaluations as a primary means for assessing and improving their teaching effectiveness. Literature on faculty development indicates an approach employing multiple means of assessing and improving instructional effectiveness can be even more useful. The techniques suggested are as follows: course materials analysis; field based evaluations; interviews of graduates; observation by colleagues (clinical observation and checklist observation); self-report journal; student evaluations; and videotape and self-analysis using Evaluation of Teaching Form. For each technique, there is a description of purpose and rationale, how to employ the technique, and analysis/use of results. These techniques offer a few possibilities for the improvement of teaching effectiveness. A self-designed system is recommended. Contains 4 references. (SM)

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ALTERNATIVES FOR DEVELOPING TEACHING EFFECTIVENESS

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Running head: EVALUATION ALTERNATIVES

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Alternatives for Developing Teaching Effectiveness

Increasingly, higher education faculty are being encouraged to evaluate and improve their teaching effectiveness in the classroom. Recent reports of the National Institute of Education and the Carnegie Commission have called for a renewed emphasis on excellence in college and university teaching.

Traditionally, faculty have relied upon student evaluations as a primary means for assessing and improving their teaching effectiveness. While this technique has proven useful (Dunkin & Barnes, 1986), the literature on faculty development also indicates that an approach employing multiple means of assessing and improving instructional effectiveness can be even more useful. After reviewing the research on teaching in higher education, Dunkin & Barnes (1986) concluded that strategies to improve instructional effectiveness ought to consist of a combination of approaches.

> So far, there is no indication of a one best way to improve teaching in higher education. On the contrary, the small amount of research that has been conducted suggests that there is a variety of effective ways and, therefore, the combined

approaches have a good chance of capitalizing on the strengths of each (p. 773).

With such diversity in mind, the authors present ten techniques for improving teaching. These approaches may be used singly, or in combination to enhance effectiveness in the classroom.

The authors wish to affirm the proposition prevalent in the literature (Lindquist, 1978) that instructional improvement is more likely to have positive results when "owned" and controlled by the faculty. Thus, the reader will find that techniques described in this paper will rely heavily on collegial support and consultation.

It has been the experience of the authors that instructional improvement most often occurs when attention is focused on specific elements of the instructional process such as discussion techniques or test construction rather than global concerns such as improving motivation of students. We believe it is important for the faculty member who has the desire to develop her/his instructional skills to specify particular elements of the teaching process for study, analysis, and review. If at first it is not possible to focus on specific areas for improvement, we would recommend beginning with a collection of various kinds of data for analysis with the goal of selecting one or two areas for improvement.

Finally, it is the authors intent to identify alternatives for instructional development which will be economical in institutional costs and faculty time. Of these considerations, time is probably more important. The demands of teaching, often combined with pressures for extra-teaching activity and other professional expectations, make it necessary that strategies for instructional improvement be efficient as well as effective.

With the foregoing assumptions and qualifications noted, the following techniques are presented with the hope that the reader will find one or more to be suitable strategies.

TECHNIQUE: Course Materials Analysis

PURPOSE AND RATIONALE:

This technique is intended to be used for the examination of content and materials of a given course. Course syllabi (including items such as objectives, instructional activities, and materials) are analyzed according to predetermined criteria.

HOW TO EMPLOY THE TECHNIQUE:

It is appropriate for the instructor to ask two or three colleagues who are knowledgable in at least part of the course content to serve as a review committee. The committee's first task is for individual members to read the syllabus, review the text, supplementary readings, and handouts, and respond in writing to predetermined questions. These questions may relate to specific criteria, such as currency, relevancy, or accreditation standards. The committee then meets and discusses the results of the review process. A final meeting is conducted with the course instructor to clarify information and provide feedback which may include strengths of the course as well as suggestions for improvement. After this final meeting the committee prepares a written summary of findings for the course instructor.

ANALYSIS AND USE OF RESULTS:

The meeting of the committee and the instructor can clarify for all what is currently being done in the course under review. In addition, the course instructor will have an opportunity to discuss the recommendations of the committee. A follow-up to this process should be conducted after sufficient time has been allowed for the instructor to make recommended changes. A simple method for follow-up is for the instructor to review the final written report given by the committee, and then prepare a written response to the various suggestions that were made, including a description of changes and rationale for decisions not to use certain recommendations of the committee. A positive side effect of this review process is that the review committee members benefit by learning about individual courses within a particular program.

TECHNIQUE: Field Based Evaluations

PURPOSE AND RATIONALE:

An important part of many programs is a field experience. It is a common response of graduates to cite the field experience as the most valuable part of a given program. University supervision of this experience often includes one-on-one teaching and small group instruction as well as public relations work with on-site field supervisors and managers. It is important that university supervisors be knowledgable as well as sensitive to their vital role of public relations.

HOW TO EMPLOY THE TECHNIQUE:

The university supervisor of the field experience can receive valuable information about his/her performance by distributing evaluation forms to the students, on-site field supervisors, and in some cases, to the managers in the field. This usually is done at the end of the student's field experience or after an extended period of time as a field supervisor. A greater amount of time is necessary because supervisors usually work with relatively few students. Evaluation forms may include information as to whether the evaluator is a student, field supervisor, or administrator, and should include both cognitive and

affective items that will focus on the supervisor's expertise as well as his/her ability to interact with people.

It is important for the university supervisor to provide self-addressed, stamped envelopes to ensure that forms can be returned anonymously.

ANALYSIS AND USE OF RESULTS:

Since the number of students supervised at any one time period is usually small, it is most helpful to analyze the results over an extended period of time to determine strengths and areas needing improvement. Because of the frequent contact of university supervisors with the same field supervisors, consideration should be given to how often the evaluation process should occur in order for it to be helpful and not overused.

After analyzing the results of the evaluations, the university supervisor should set specific goals and a plan for meeting those goals.

TECHNIQUE: Interviews of Graduates.

PURPOSE & RATIONALE:

This technique is intended to provide evaluative data from persons who have completed a class. It responds to the common perception that certain courses can be appreciated and evaluated more realistically only after several weeks or months of reflection. This longer period of time allows for a more accurate assessment of the value of a course as it relates to one's broader educational goals.

HOW TO EMPLOY THE TECHNIQUE:

Two procedures are generally used to collect information from graduates of courses or programs. The first is the interview. Here, graduates are asked to respond, in person, to questions posed by an interviewer. The interviewer takes careful notes, then prepares a summary report relating to predetermined criteria. A second technique involves the use of a questionnaire mailed to graduates. As in the interview, graduates respond to questions this time presented in paper-and-pencil format. The questionnaires are then returned for analysis and review. Typically, a questionnaire would focus on issues related to usefulness of course content and recommended changes for future versions of the class. A full description

of techniques and procedures for developing and analyzing questionnaires and interview data may be obtained from the relevant literature.

ANALYSIS AND USE OF RESULTS:

Information gathered should be carefuly reviewed to identify areas of strength as well as those needing improvement. Once the areas are identified, steps can be taken to strengthen, or make changes as indicated. It is important to remember that in using this technique, the focus will be upon the gathering of information about the content of the class and teaching effectiveness. Often, it is helpful to consult with colleagues in the identification of areas needing further development.

TECHNIQUE: Observation by Colleagues.

PURPOSE AND RATIONALE:

Classroom observation by colleagues can be an effective means for analyzing teaching effectiveness. Informal observations can be improved by "scripting" the observed lesson. This involves writing what is said in the class and using the resulting script as a data base for analyzing the teaching.

Another observation method includes developing a set of criteria, then checking off each as it is appropriately used during the lesson.

The primary advantage of classroom observation as a tool for analyzing and evaluating teaching is that it allows the observer to see the interpersonal dynamics of a class as well as gather specific information on teaching performance. Two types of observation will be described:
1) Clinical Observation, and 2) Checklist Observation.

HOW TO EMPLOY CLINICAL OBSERVATION:

One of the most effective models of teacher observation, developed by Madeline Hunter (1980), is labeled "clinical supervision." Clinical supervision involves a pre-conference in which the observer and the teacher determine the type of observation to be conducted. Hunter

divides these conferences into two general types: instructional and evaluative. Instructional conferences may focus on various objectives such as those that follow: 1) Analyzing a lesson to determine what worked in the lesson and why. 2) Expanding a teacher's repertoire of strategies for effective teaching. 3) Analyzing a lesson to identify unsatisfactory aspects and strategizing ways to improve those aspects. 4) Developing a plan for continued professional growth (Hunter, 1980).

ANALYSIS AND USE OF RESULTS: CLINICAL SUPERVISION

After the observer has scripted the lesson, the data are analyzed. As the observer interacts with the teacher, the script is used as the basis for further analysis. The script provides actual examples from the lesson for discussion. The examples allow both the teacher and the observer to focus on specific teacher/student behaviors rather than on generalities. This specificity assists the teacher in more clearly understanding the instructional skills being discussed.

This clinical supervision model has clearly defined guidelines for its use. It has been employed widely and successfully in providing teachers with valuable information for improving their teaching. Its effectiveness may further be increased when applied to a series of classroom

observations rather than a single observation. However, this process is time consuming and requires the observer to have specific skills for effectively analyzing and evaluating teaching.

HOW TO EMPLOY CHECKLIST OBSERVATION

For teachers who want to use classroom observation as a means of evaluating their teaching but do not want to be involved in the more time consuming clinical supervision process, a self designed form may be a suitable alternative. The observer uses a checklist as a guide while observing the lesson. This form serves as a useful tool for feedback because it identifies specific aspects of a lesson for analysis.

ANALYSIS AND USE OF RESULTS: CHECKLIST OBSERVATION

Immediately following the lesson the observer discusses the lesson with the teacher using the checklist as a focus for analysis. Written comments by the observer are especially helpful as they can further explain the topics on the checklist. After analyzing the checklist the teacher identifies strengths of the lesson as well as areas needing additional support. Specific ideas for further development are generated.

TECHNIQUE: Self Report Journal

PURPOSE AND RATIONALE:

The purpose of keeping a journal is to chronicle long term information about individuals, groups or activities. The journal can assist in discovering patterns, problems, and trends. The journal provides the database upon which course changes can be made. Retrospective journal-keeping allows time for reflection and evaluation based on the goals of the course or activity. This activity personalizes data through the recording of an individual's experiences.

HOW TO EMPLOY THIS TECHNIQUE:

The person recording the data in a journal should develop a taxonomy or theoretical framework to give organization and purpose for the recording of events. For example, one might want to record the types of class discussions as they relate to the levels of Bloom's Taxonomy (1956). Usually, this will relate to course goals and objectives. Whatever the case, it is important that a predetermined framework be used to guide the writer in her/his retrospective recording.

ANALYSIS AND USE OF DATA:

One way to analyze the data is to summarize by

frequency counts in predetermined categories. These counts can then be compared with "ideal" counts. The discrepancies between what is thought to be ideal, and what is recorded becomes the area of need. Comparisons with "ideal" counts or descriptions in all categories can be very informative. Another analytic approach involves submitting the journal to a panel of colleagues for their review.

TECHNIQUE: Student Evaluations

PURPOSE AND RATIONALE:

Student evaluations of teacher performance have long been used as a primary means of evaluating teaching effectiveness. As direct participants in the teaching/learning situation, students are in an excellent position to evaluate certain aspects of the effectiveness of instruction.

HOW TO EMPLOY THE TECHNIQUE:

Student evaluations follow the process of the teacher distributing a form that contains a set of questions designed to evaluate the course. This form, usually endorsed by the institution, often includes rating scales to evaluate various aspects of the class.

Typically student evaluations are given at the conclusion of a course, but they can also be effective if given at an earlier time, such as mid-term. This provides an opportunity for the teacher to respond to student concerns by making appropriate changes for the latter half of the term.

Perhaps one of the most helpful components of a student evaluation form is an open ended question in which students can write additional comments about the course. Often these

statements are more revealing than the rating scale. It is recommended that all student evaluation forms include some open-ended questions such as: What did you like best about this class? Why? What would you like changed in this class? and Why would you like those changes made?

While there are limitations to student evaluations such as measurement of long term learning, they continue in widespread use. Although there is some evidence that student ratings can be manipulated by the teacher, those who are sincere in soliciting feedback from their students will probably find it an effective method of evaluation.

ANALYSIS AND USE OF DATA:

Statistical analysis provides an objective assessment of the results of the evaluation. It is useful to compare mean scores over a period of time as well as means among courses. Student comment, if included, often helps in explaining and interpreting findings.

Student evaluations employing a rating scale are probably best used as the first step in analysis of teaching effectiveness. The scale can be used to identify areas in need of further study and evaluation.

TECHNIQUE: Videotape and self-analysis using Evaluation of Teaching Form.

PURPOSE AND RATIONALE:

This technique is intended to provide an opportunity to observe one's teaching and analyze instruction according to criteria included on an evaluation form. Viewing a teaching episode from the camera's perspective allows the instructor to observe presentation as well as student response to the lesson.

HOW TO EMPLOY THE TECHNIQUE:

The instructor may choose to have a student or other person videotape a lesson, or alternatively, set up the video equipment and allow it to operate unattended during class. After the class is over, the instructor reviews the videotaped lesson and evaluates it according to predetermined criteria. It is important to analyze the lesson not only for what is included but also for what has been omitted. The instructor should be able to provide a rationale for what has been included and excluded.

ANALYSIS AND USE OF RESULTS:

It is difficult to analyze a lesson during the act of teaching it. The videotaping and self-analysis process

allows a more objective view with the use of specific criteria for evaluation. After viewing the lesson and completing the evaluation form, the instructor summarizes strengths of the lesson, and writes at least one goal for improvement.

CONCLUSION

It is the authors' belief that the variety of techniques presented will offer faculty at least one or two possibilities for the improvement of teaching effectiveness. Of course, no single listing could cover all possibilities, so a final suggestion is offered: a self designed system. It will probably be useful in the development of such systems to address the four areas the authors have covered in their descriptions (technique, purpose and rationale, how to employ the technique, and analysis/use of results.) Using either a self-designed system, or a combination of alternatives we have described, faculty should be able to improve their instructional skills.

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